



MAY
2024

Policy and Advocacy: The Local Food Program

**Nourish Colorado's Strategic Role in
Transforming the State Food System**

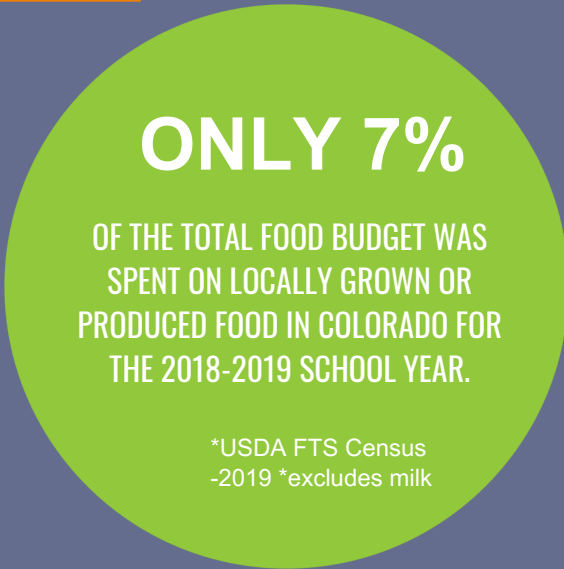
In the dynamic landscape of Colorado's food system, Nourish Colorado, a well-established statewide nonprofit organization, has played a pivotal role in fostering collaboration among partner organizations. This case study delves into Nourish Colorado's integral contribution to the advocacy and implementation of the Local Food Program, a groundbreaking initiative aimed at transforming the state's public school institutional procurement system through value chain coordination and intentional meal planning with incentivized local purchases.

THE OPPORTUNITY

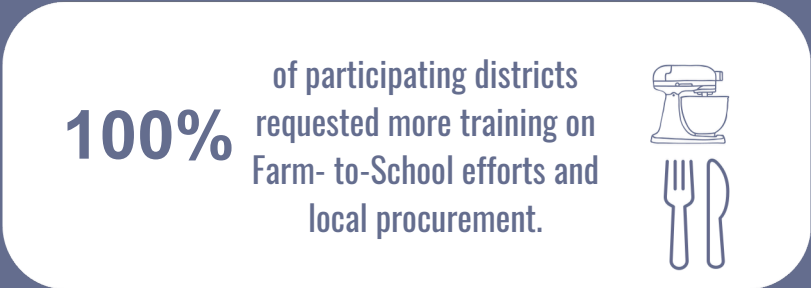
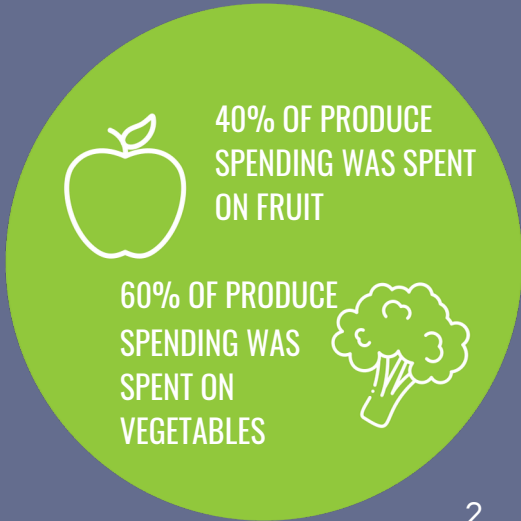
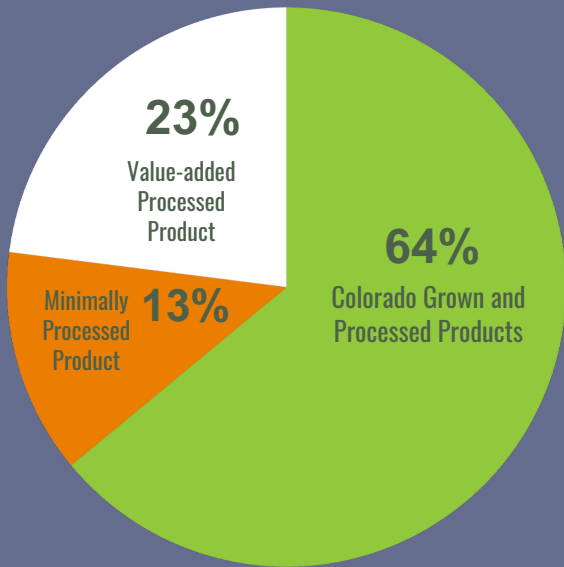
In 2018, Nourish Colorado seized an opportunity to make a significant impact on local students' access to fresh, nutritious food. As Colorado's core state partner with the national farm- to-school network, Nourish Colorado engaged with local partners and school initiatives to address the expressed need for farm-to-school programs. Inspired by Michigan's successful 10-cent-a-meal initiative, Nourish Colorado gathered stakeholders, including community members, food service directors, and school teams, to explore the feasibility of incentivizing local food procurement. The resounding "YES" paved the way for a transformative journey.

THE LOCAL FOOD PROGRAM PILOT

Nourish Colorado conducted a thorough evaluation and data analysis process, culminating in the development of HB 19-1132. This bill aimed to provide financial support to Colorado school lunch programs by encouraging the purchase of locally sourced products while promoting nutrition and supporting local producers. The legislative journey faced challenges yet Nourish Colorado's perseverance led to the adoption of the Local Food Program as a three-year pilot, later extended to four due to the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The enacted Local Food Program provided \$500,000 annually to be used for reimbursing the selected pilot schools with local procurement incentives of 5 cents per meal served and a vital training and technical assistance grant that helped schools connect with local farmers and plan meals with Colorado products.



How was the money spent?

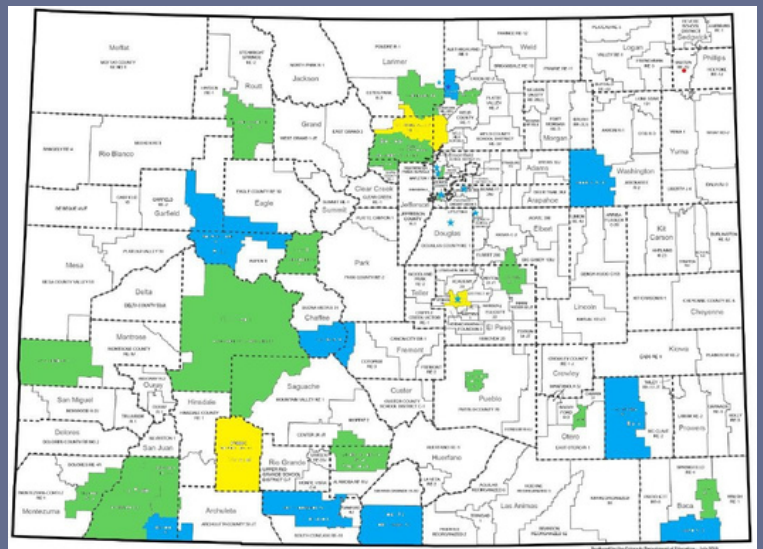


UNIVERSAL SCHOOL MEALS & THE LOCAL FOOD PROGRAM

In 2022, Hunger Free Colorado led the passage of the Healthy Meals for All ballot measure, aiming to revolutionize school nutrition by providing universal free school meals and expanding the Local Food Program. Initial polling for HSMA indicated that public support was stronger with the Local Food Program as part of the measure. The ballot measure's passage marked a significant milestone for students, school kitchen staff, farmers, and ranchers. The measure proposed a permanent expansion of the Local Food Program, incorporating universal free meals, local procurement incentives, enhanced training, technical assistance programs, and wage stipends for culinary professionals. However, the program encountered unforeseen challenges. By Spring 2024, the program faced budget shortfalls due primarily to higher-than-expected student participation rates with insufficient revenue, leading to an indefinite pause in the implementation of the Local Food Program as initially planned. These financial constraints impeded the ability to sustain the program at its intended scale. Despite these setbacks, the commitment to the initiative's core goals remains strong and Nourish Colorado was able to successfully lead an advocacy effort at the Joint Budget Committee to ensure one year of pilot-level funding for the Local Food Program be included in the measure to provide bridge funding of universal meals for this year and next. The Local Food Program will continue as a pilot for one more year, offering valuable insights and benefits on a smaller scale. Nourish Colorado is dedicated to maintaining the program's momentum through ongoing technical assistance and training. Additionally, Nourish Colorado is convening partners and working to identify policy and funding solutions to ensure the program is funded.

CONCLUSION

The Local Food Program represents a transformative vision for school nutrition in Colorado. School meal operators actively participate in this initiative and remain vocal in their efforts to offer fresh, local products to students. Their engagement has not only provided valuable insights, but also underscores the demand for such a program across the state. Although full implementation is delayed, the pilot program and continuous advocacy efforts by Nourish Colorado illustrate a resilient and collaborative effort to achieve the long-term goal of providing nutritious and locally sourced meals for students statewide.



2023 - 2024 LOCAL FOOD PROGRAM NEW & REPEATING PARTICIPATING PROVIDERS

